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## SEVEN NOTES

### 1. VITA NUOVA, SONETTO QUARTO, 55-6

In the prose *ragione* that begins Chapter VIII, Dante tells us (ll. 8-12, Witte edition) that he has sometimes seen the departed *gentildonna* in company with Beatrice; and of this fact, he adds, he has made mention "in the last part of the words" that he wrote on her death, "as is plainly evident to one who understands." We are to seek, then, in the closing lines of the fourth sonnet, a covert reference to this lady's companionship with the *gentilissima*; moreover, Dante's phraseology leads us to suspect a double meaning in these verses. This suspicion is heightened by the statement, in the following *divisione* (ll. 59-61), that the author, in the passage in question, is addressing "an indefinite person," although in his own mind the person addressed is "definite."

I would propose, therefore, the following double interpretation of the verses

"Chi non merta salute,  
Non sperì mai d'aver sua compagnia."

As addressed to an "indiffinita persona," they obviously signify: "Let no one undeserving of salvation ever hope to enjoy her company (inasmuch as she is to be found only in heaven)." But to the "persona diffinita" — namely, Dante himself — they convey the warning: "Unless thou deservest *salutation* (or, perhaps, *blessedness*), never hope to enjoy *the company that she had* (that is, the company of Beatrice)."

### 2. INFERNO, XVI, 136

The monster heaving up into sight through the thick air is compared to a diver returning to the surface,

"Che in su si stende, e da piè si rattrappa."

Benvenuto explains: "Manus ampliat et extendit superius, et pedes restringit inferius." Subsequent commentators have followed him. This interpretation seems perfectly satisfactory to one not used to swimming under water, but to any one accustomed to diving it presents

difficulties. A diver does not draw up his feet, unless it be to kick them out again; the best position for the legs, after a smart push, is one of rigid extension, so as to offer the least possible resistance.

Casini assumes that the diver is climbing up the anchor rode, and clinging to it with his legs, — a most laborious and time-consuming process, quite out of place in a situation where a second's delay may prove fatal. Such a rope almost always slants diagonally through the water, forming a line very much longer than the vertical ascent; it is, moreover, exceedingly hard to hold. Why should a diver be so foolish as to attempt to crawl along it, when he knows that by simply letting go he will pop up to the surface?

I think Dante is referring here to the *appearance* of a body seen through the water. Such a body is magnified in its upper part, and at the same time violently foreshortened. The effect is heightened if the body be that of a swimmer who is reaching out with his hands.

### 3. PURGATORIO, IX, 5-6

In all the discussion of the "freddo animale" no one seems to have observed that the words

"Che con la coda *percuote la gente*"

look like a simple translation of *Revelation*, IX, 5: "Et cruciatus eorum, ut cruciatus scorpionum cum *percutit hominem*." This fact ought to go far toward settling the vexed question of the identity of the "animale." Dante's thought may well have been: "The cold creature which, as is written in the *Apocalypse*, 'percutit hominem.'"

### 4. PURGATORIO, XXII, 40-42

For the interpretation of the difficult lines

"Per che non reggi tu, o sacra fame  
Dell' oro, l' appetito de' mortali?"

which, it will be remembered, are a reproduction of Virgil's

"Quid non mortalia pectora cogis,  
Auri sacra fames!" (*Aen.* III, 56-57),

I have to offer an explanation slightly different from those given by Scartazzini, Casini, Pellegrini, and Moore (*Studies*, I, pp. 186-187). The Italian words apparently mean: "Why, O righteous hunger for

gold, dost thou not govern mortals' desire?" That is, why does not a moderate and therefore blessed love of worldly goods check the excesses of avarice and prodigality? On the other hand, it is inconceivable that Dante should have misunderstood Virgil's phrase, which, of course, means something quite different. Why may we not assume that Dante saw in the Latin poet's lines a double meaning? Beneath the obvious literal signification he may have discerned a moral sense, which he expressed in his version. In this case the words of Statius (v. 38),

"Quand' io *intesi* là dove tu esclame,"

would mean: "When I *comprehended the hidden significance* of thine exclamation."

The use of *reggi* may have been suggested by the lines of Boethius (*De Cons. Phil.*, Lib. II, end of Met. 8):

"O felix hominum genus  
Si vestros animos amor,  
Quo cælum regitur, regat!"

##### 5. PURGATORIO, XXXI, 132

The word *caribo*, which apparently means a dance measure or tune, occurs also, as has been pointed out, in Giacomino Pugliese (D' Ancona e Comparetti, *Le antiche rime volgari*, I, p. 388):

"Però a voi m' apresento  
A tal convento,  
Isto caribo  
Ben distribo:  
Dele maldicente  
Bon' ò talento:  
Lo stornento  
Vo sonando,  
E cantando,  
Blondetta piagente."

The editors remark (V, p. 351): "Questo caribo . . . sembra, per quel che segue, una danza o un canto." The earliest commentators on Dante seem to have found the word perfectly intelligible. As far as I can discover, nobody has pointed out the evident identity of *caribo* with the Provençal *gariþs* in the *Leis d'amors* (Appel, *Provenzalische Chrestomathie*, No. 124, l. 173): "De *gariþs* no nos entremetem, quar solamen han respieg a cert e especial so d' esturmens, ses verba."

It is natural to connect this word with the Arabic *gharb*, "strange" or "foreign;" and, in fact, we find a word akin to *gharb* used to indicate a kind of music. The following excerpt from G. Höst's *Nachrichten von Maròkos und Fes im Lande selbst gesammelt, in den Jahren 1760-1768, aus dem Dänischen übersetzt* (Kopenhagen, 1781), was procured for me, in the library of Leyden, by Dr. M. M. Skinner, of Harvard University: "§ 7. *Poesie und Musik der Mauren*. — Sie haben keine geschriebene Musik aber sie müssen doch notwendig einige *Notas characteristicas* oder Kennzeichen haben, um die eine Melodie von der anderen zu unterscheiden, zu denen sie verschiedene Namen haben." A list of forty-two names follows, among them "Rgrabt elhasin." The word that Höst transcribes "Rgrabt" is an abstract noun derived from *ghrb*, the root of *gharb*. The author adds: "Einige von diesen Melodien haben sie von Spanien mitgebracht, andere haben sie von den Türken bekommen."

#### 6. PARADISO, XIII, 133-135

I cannot find that any one has called attention to the striking resemblance between these lines and a passage in *Ab la dolchor del temps novel*, by Guilhem de Peitieu (Appel, *Provençalische Chrestomathie*, No. 10, vv. 13-18):

"La nostr' amor va enaissi  
Com la branca del albespi,  
Qu'esta sobre l'arbr' entrenan,  
La nuoit, ab la ploia ez al gel,  
Tro l'endeman, que l s'espans,  
Par la fueilla verz el ramel."

Dante's verses are:

"Ch' io ho veduto tutto il verno prima  
Il prun mostrarsi rigido e feroce,  
Poscia portar la rosa in su la cima."

#### 7. PARADISO, XXII, 75

The phrase "per danno delle carte," meaning "as waste paper," is obviously allied to the Provençal expression *getar* (or *metre*) *a son dan*, "to throw away" or "to despise," which may perhaps have been originally a book-keeping term. See Levy, *Provençalisches Supplement-Wörterbuch*, under *Dan*.

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